

Health Leaders Camp Inspires High School Students



Seventy eager high school students from the Central Florida area are getting an immersive introduction to careers in health and medicine at the Health Leaders camp this week. The camp is an initiative of the College of Medicine's Health Leaders and Explorers (HEAL) pipeline program which is designed to increase the diversity of students in medical education and better prepare them to enter health care professions. Health Leaders works with high school students in Orange and Osceola counties; Health Explorers is for middle schoolers. Now in its fifth year, the program provides hands-on educational experiences for high school students from groups that are underrepresented in the health profession.

Participants are engaged in a series of activities including a research project, campus tour and mentoring by UCF faculty and students who will show them the path to successful health careers.

The program was pioneered by Dr. Lisa Barkley, assistant dean for diversity and inclusion, who underscored the importance of encouraging diversity in medicine.

"It has been proven that having a doctor that looks like you improves patient outcomes," Dr. Barkley explained, "but the number of black, Latino and Native American physicians

in the United States has not increased over the last 40 years. They still only make up about three to six percent of medical professionals.”

Dr. Barkley explained that the three main goals of the program are to enhance the academic performance of the students, provide mentoring and deliver a hands-on experience to improve life and academic skills, leadership and confidence.

The program started out with Jones High School in 2011, a school with a 95% African American population, and has since grown to include other middle and high schools in Orange and Osceola County. There are other middle schools that participate – I’d just leave it generic.

The two-week camp welcomes students from Osceola County this week and students from Orange County next week.

“I love working with the kids and helping them be successful,” said Dr. Barkley. “It is really special to work with them and to see their growth and development.”

By Wendy Sarubbi

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